
Appendix eight – About the audit

Audit objective

To assess whether the Department of Education is effectively supporting students with disability in NSW public schools.

Audit criteria

We addressed the audit objective by assessing whether:

1. The Department designed and delivered approaches that effectively support students with disability
2. The Department is addressing the needs of students with disability.

Audit scope and focus

In assessing the audit criteria, we examined the following aspects:

- a) The Disability Strategy and other relevant measures reflect relevant research and evidence, lessons from previous reviews and evaluations, and align with relevant legislative requirements.
- b) Delivery is effective with:
 - i) appropriate governance to provide authority and levers to coordinate action and drive achievement of the objectives
 - ii) adequate resourcing to achieve equitable outcomes for students across the public school system
 - iii) mechanisms to identify and address risks to Strategy delivery, including divergence in practice
 - iv) flexibility to adapt approaches where required
 - v) achievement of expected outcomes.
- c) Relevant outputs and outcomes are defined and measured in a meaningful way, routinely monitored, and inform practice.
- d) There is ongoing consultation with people with lived experience, advocates, and other relevant stakeholders, and regular public reporting on progress and outcomes in supporting students with disability.
- e) The Department accounts for intersectionality and compounding factors of disadvantage when designing, implementing and evaluating initiatives to support students with disability
- f) Students with disability can access relevant supports to meet their learning and wellbeing needs
- g) There is evidence to indicate that the Department's strategy and other relevant measures are improving the provision of inclusive education in schools, and learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with disability, across the public system.

This audit focused on students with disabilities in NSW public schools. The timeframe examines activities from 2018 to 2023. The audit looked at the policies and practices at, or those focused on delivery in, NSW public schools including mainstream schools and specialist settings such as Schools for Specific Purposes, NSW public schools in all locations including schools in regional, rural and remote NSW, and pathways between school settings in the public education system.

Audit exclusions

The audit did not assess:

- Policies and practices at:
 - Catholic and other non-government schools
 - Early childhood education and outside of school hours (OOSH) care services
 - Vocational education and training services
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) including the provision of supports during school hours.
- Student behaviour management policies and practices.
- The merits of government policy objectives.
- The merits of Commonwealth definitions of disability and the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD).

Audit approach

Our procedures included:

1. Interviewing approximately:
 - 115 Department of Education staff in policy, corporate, data and delivery support roles
 - 155 school staff including principals, executive teachers, learning and support teachers, classroom teachers, school counsellors/psychologists, and school learning support officers
 - 30 external stakeholder group representatives including disability sector representatives, disability advocates, peak bodies and academics.
2. Linking and analysing 15 statewide datasets relating to students and teachers including enrolment, attendance, disability adjustments (NCCD data), suspensions, expulsions, NAPLAN, HSC, professional learning, and survey results, for each year of the audit review period (2018-2023).
3. Examining approximately 7,000 documents, including policies, strategies, data reports, plans, guidelines, management reports, executive briefs, initiative reviews and evaluations.
4. Considering the 109 contributions made to the public audit mailbox.
5. Visiting 14 schools in different parts of the state. We used a judgemental sampling approach to select schools based on the following criteria:
 - location (a mix of metropolitan Sydney, inner regional and outer regional NSW schools)
 - educational setting (at least one of each of primary, secondary, central mainstream schools with and without support classes; and Schools for Specific Purposes)
 - demographic and other characteristics of the school community (including schools with different socio-economic advantage indices, schools with high and low proportions of culturally and linguistically diverse students, schools with high and low proportions of Aboriginal students, co-educational and same-sex schools etc).

The audit approach was complemented by quality assurance processes within the Audit Office to ensure compliance with professional standards.

Audit methodology

Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Auditing Standard ASAE 3500 Performance Engagements and other professional standards. The standards require the audit team to comply with relevant ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance and draw a conclusion on the audit objective. Our processes have also been designed to comply with requirements specified in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by the Department of Education. In particular, we would like to thank our liaison officers and other departmental staff, and schools who hosted our visits, participated in interviews and provided evidence for the audit.

We also appreciate the considered feedback provided by the Disability Strategy Reference Group, public contributors to the audit mailbox, and other disability sector representatives, advocates, peak bodies and academics.

Audit cost

The estimated cost of this audit is \$700,000.